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AUTHOR Schertzer, C.; And Others

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ABSTRACT

Forty students in the Executive MBA (Master of Business Administration) program at Xavier University (Cincinnati, Ohio) completed a required overseas study tour, with approximately half visiting Japan and Singapore and half visiting England, Belgium, and Germany. The purpose of the tour was to explore and assess innovative business strategies, international business strategies, the role of quality, and cultural adaptation in the business environment in Asia and Europe. Instructional components included presentations by prominent business and government leaders, 5-hour visits to companies in small groups, and cultural tours. This paper presents findings on participants' attitudes based on pre-tour and post-tour survey data. Results indicated that: (1) the largest changes in participants' attitudes occurred for those statements relating to participants' "comfort" levels; (2) in all cases, participants felt more comfortable after the overseas study tour; (3) after the tour, participants responded that it is less difficult to enter a foreign market than they had felt prior to the tour; and (4) the tour increased the awareness of management practices and negotiating similarities around the world. The paper concludes that overseas study tours should become an increasingly important component of Executive MBA programs everywhere. (JDD)

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C. Schertzer, C. Schuster, and R. Zimmerman

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C. Schertzer, C. Schuster, and R. Zimmerman

Xavier University, Cincinnati

Abstract. **This paper presents survey results showing (1) the attitudes of executive MBA students in two overseas study tours conducted by Xavier University in June, 1992 regarding the business and cultural environment for doing business in Asia and Europe, (2) changes in participants' attitudes, and (3) evidence of experiential learning that occurred during the study tours.**

INTRODUCTION

In June, 1992, Xavier University implemented its first "required" Executive MBA overseas study tour. Approximately one half of the forty member Class of 1993 spent ten days in Japan and Singapore studying the business and cultural environment for "Doing Business in Asia." The group also included several Xavier faculty members, an administrative assistant, and several participants from the business community who enrolled in the study tour as "for credit, full-participants." The other group, similarly constituted, visited England, Belgium, and Germany exploring "Doing Business in Europe." The vast majority of the student participants were visiting the respective overseas locations for the first time.

While abroad, students attended lectures by faculty members and business people (Americans doing business abroad as well as foreign business people), participated in company visits, and hosted a "thank you" social gathering for the local participants. Upon returning to Xavier, those enrolled in the study course for credit (3 hours) were required to write a paper on what they had learned about the business and cultural climate for doing business in Asia or Europe.

Study tour participants were asked to complete pre- and post-tour surveys designed to assess their attitudes about the business and cultural climate for doing business in Asia or Europe. This paper presents our findings on participants' attitudes based on data obtained from the pre- and post-tour surveys. A prime objective of the study is to identify evidence of experiential learning from the study tours abroad.

PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Xavier University's overseas study tours to Asia and Europe in June, 1992 were the culmination of more than two years of gathering data on existing overseas programs, on-site planning visits to both Asia and Europe, and an initial "Doing Business in Asia" tour conducted in June, 1991.

In the Fall of 1990, Xavier University's Center for International Business surveyed 97 Executive MBA programs concerning whether or not these programs included or were planning to include an overseas experience and, if so, the nature of these programs. From the Directory of Executive MBA Programs (1989), 97 Executive MBA programs were identified for the mailing list. Of the 97 questionnaires sent, 57 responses were received. Of the respondents, 20 (35%) indicated having overseas components in their Executive MBA programs and 18 (32%) responded that they were planning one. The results of that survey were presented at the 1992 EMU Conference (Schuster and Zimmerman, 1991). Based upon the findings of other overseas programs and a planning visit to Asia by the Director of Xavier's Center for International Business, a ten day international travel course was offered in June, 1991, sending a total of eighteen students, faculty, and interested business leaders from the local community to Japan and Singapore. Based on follow-up survey data gathered from the participants of that study tour, it became apparent that a significant amount of experiential learning had taken place (Schuster and Zimmerman, 1992).

Inherent in the development of Xavier's overseas programs was the presumption that there is value to be gained from experiential learning--something that is not, or perhaps can not be as effectively achieved from classroom experience, textbooks, or other traditional learning modes. Recent work on learning styles and teaching methodologies as they relate to the ways in which people of different cultures learn (Maruyama 1989), the roles of instructors in cross-cultural business and management training (Larson and Schermerhorn 1989), and the value of experiential learning (Shively 1986, and Bolt 1990) underscore the value of on-site experiences. The Xavier

overseas study tours, therefore, are intentionally designed to enhance the value of experiential learning.

By June, 1992 (i.e., beginning with the Class of 1993) the Doing Business in Asia and Europe study tours had become a regular, required part of the Executive MBA program. Asia was chosen as the site for the first overseas experience because of the growing number of Japanese businesses in the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana area, because we had alumni and business acquaintances in Japan and Singapore who supported the project, and because of the location of a Jesuit university in Tokyo (Sophia University) at which we were able to use classroom facilities. Europe was added because of its importance in the global economy, to give the Executive MBA students a choice of overseas sites, and because we had Cincinnati business connections who supported the project.

The purpose of the Doing Business in Asia and Europe--1992 courses was to explore and assess innovative business strategies, international business strategies, the role of quality, and cultural adaptation in the business environment in Asia and Europe. The instructional components of the course included three activities: presentations by prominent business and government leaders, 5 hour visits to companies in small groups, and cultural tours. From participants' experiences in Asia 1991, we were able to determine those aspects of the trip with which participants were pleased or displeased as well as suggestions for improving future trips. These ideas were incorporated in the 1992 tours.

ATTITUDE SURVEY

Participants in the Doing Business in Asia/Europe 1992 study tours were given pre- and post-tour attitude surveys. We received 20 matched-pairs of responses from those participants who went to Asia; 24 matched-pairs were received from those who went to Europe. The results of those surveys are presented in Tables 1-5.

Participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with 20 attitudinal statements. Some of the statements were area specific; for example, "Trade barriers make it almost impossible to do business with Japan." Some statements, given to participants of both the Asian and European tours, were more general; for example, "Management practices are fundamentally the same around the world." Each participant was asked to indicate his or her agreement with each statement using the following Likert scale: 5 Strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Neutral, 2 Disagree,

1 Strongly Disagree. The mean scores from the pre-tour surveys are reported in the first column of Tables 1-4. For example, the first column in Table 1 indicates that the mean score for the statement, "Understanding the culture of a country is important for success in business," on the pre-tour survey for participants who went to Asia was 4.95. Responses to this statement indicated the highest level of agreement. The first column in Table 2 indicates that the mean score for the statement, "Negotiating with business people in the United States is very similar to negotiating with business people in other countries," on the pre-tour survey, for participants who went to Asia was 1.30. Responses to this statement indicated the highest level of disagreement for participants who went to Asia. The first column in Tables 3-4 for participants on the European tour are interpreted similarly.

The second column in Tables 1-4 show the changes in the mean scores from the pre- to post-tour surveys. For example, the second column in Table 1 indicates that the mean score for the statement, "Understanding the culture of a country is important for success in business," for those participants who went to Asia was 0.10 lower on the post-tour survey than it was before the tour. A -0.10 mean change in Table 1 would indicate that the respondents agreed less with the statement after the tour than they did before the tour. Similarly, the second column in Table 2 indicates that the mean score for the statement, "Negotiating with business people in the United States is very similar to negotiating with business people in other countries," for those participants who went to Asia was 0.35 higher on the post-tour survey than it was before the tour. A 0.35 mean change in Table 2 would indicate that the respondents disagreed less with the statement after the tour than they did before the tour. The second column in Tables 3-4 for participants on the European tour are interpreted similarly.

Table 5 ranks the changes in the mean scores based on the pre- and post-tour surveys for all participants. Each statement indicates whether the respondents went to Asia or Europe. The data in Table 5 are interpreted in the following way: The statement, "I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with Japanese companies, " was responded to by the 20 tour participants who went to Asia and completed both a pre- and post-tour survey. The pre-tour mean score indicated that the respondents disagreed with the statement prior to the tour. A change of +1.04, therefore, indicates that the respondents disagreed with the statement less after the tour. (Clearly, some respondents may have agreed with the statement; deviations from the mean and tests of statistical significance are not reported here, due to the small sample size. Only directional changes are indicated. Surveys of future classes will increase sample size and permit testing for significance.) If the respondents disagreed with a statement prior to the tour, a positive mean change indicates that the respondents disagreed less with the statement after the tour. Vise versa, a

negative mean change indicates that the respondents disagreed more with the statement after the tour. If the respondents agreed with a statement prior to the tour, a positive mean change indicates that the respondents agreed more with the statement after the tour. Vice versa, a negative mean change indicates that the respondents agreed less with the statement after the tour. The ranking in Table 5 is according to the size of the attitude change. A statement ranked higher indicates that the respondents expressed a larger attitude change for this statement, positive or negative, than they did for statements ranked lower.

SURVEY RESULTS

- The largest changes in participants' attitudes occurred for those statements relating to participants' "comfort" levels (Table 5). The three largest attitude changes related to how participants felt about developing their company's competitive strategies. Four of the five largest attitude changes, six of the largest nine, and eight of the largest fifteen reported changes in attitudes related to participants' "comfort" levels. Of the eight attitude changes related to "comfort" levels, four were among Asia participants, four were among Europe participants.

- Of the eight statements relating to participants' "comfort" levels, (i.e., statements #1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 15 in Table 5) respondents reported <u>in all cases</u> feeling <u>more</u> comfortable after the overseas study tour, regardless of the overseas location.

- After having gone on the overseas study tours, participants responded that it is less difficult to enter a foreign market than they had responded prior to the overseas experience. (Table 5; Questions # 7, 10.)

- Statements 6 and 16 (Table 5) relating to perceptions of "management practices," and statements 14 and 17 relating to perceptions of "negotiating practices" were posed to the participants of both overseas locations. For both statements and for both groups of participants, respondents reported "disagreeing less" with the statement on the post-tour survey. The study tour apparently increased the awareness of management practices and negotiating <u>similarities</u> around the world.

CONCLUSIONS

Students typically enrolled in Executive MBA programs are somewhat older and tend to possess more "hands-on" business experience than students enrolled in regular MBA programs. Indeed, significant business experience is usually a requirement for entrance into most such programs. Many Executive MBA students have had course work or have read extensively on such matters as international finance, trade practices, and management. In today's market place, it is not unusual, therefore, to find Executive MBA students who have been players in major companies engaged in global business, who have had personal business experience abroad, and who are knowledgeable about international business and cultural differences.

It has been our experience from having taught Executive MBA students, that these students have typically developed strong attitudes and very definite opinions. It would seem, therefore, that to demonstrate that (1) these students might experience significant changes in their attitudes as a result of taking a 10 day overseas study tour, and (2) that these attitude changes were essentially the same whether the student went to Asia or to Europe, would be a worthy challenge. Yet, we believe that the findings presented here, while admittedly based on a one-class, one overseas study-tour sample, suggests that attitudes with regard to global business practices and cultural differences are indeed affected by international study tours similar to those offered by Xavier University in 1992. The evidence in this case seems to suggest clearly that demonstrable experiential learning has occurred, and that overseas study tours should become an increasingly important component of Executive MBA programs everywhere.

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TABLE 1

Asia

Statements 20 Participants Agreed With Most Strongly On Pre-Test

Statement	Pre-Test Means	Post-Test Changes
1. Understanding the culture of a country is important for success in business	4.95	-0.10
2. Entering a foreign market to do business is very difficult	4.30	-0.75
3. Studying abroad is an integral part of learning about international business	4.30	-0.10
4. Talking to Asian business people and/or academics is an appropriate way to learn how to do business in Asia	4.05	-0.05
5. The United States may rank behind the Japanese in economic power by the year 2010	3.90	0
6. Talking to U.S. business people and/or academics with experience in Asia is an appropriate way to learn how to do business in Asia	3.90	-0.15
7. Speaking the official language of a country is important for success in business	3.70	-0.15
8. I would feel comfortable being part of a team sent by my company to set up business in Asia	3.70	+0.65
9. Reading books is an appropriate way to learn how to do business in Asia	3.35	-0.30
10. The Asian's indirect style of communication makes it easy for them to mislead other people	3.20	+0.30

TABLE 2

Asia

Statements 20 Participants Disagreed With Most Strongly On Pre-Test

Statement	Pre-Test Means	Post-Test Changes
1. Negotiating with business people in the United States is very similar to negotiating with business people in other countries	1.30	+0.35
2. Management practices are fundamentally the same around the world	1.60	+0.40
3. Knowing the culture of one Asian country is sufficient for developing business practices suitable throughout the Pacific Rim	1.70	-0.20
4. Acting humble means that you are begging for business	1.85	+0.05
5. Doing business with people from Asia makes me uncomfortable	2.10	+0.10
6. I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with companies in Asia	2.11	+0.99
7. I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with Japanese companies	2.16	+1.04
8. I would feel comfortable being the primary representative of my company to set up business in Asia	2.55	+0.75
9. Relationship-building is a way to get non-Asian business people to show their position first	2.70	+0.20
10. Trade barriers make it almost impossible to do business with Japan	2.80	-0.95

TABLE 3

Europe

Statements 24 Participants Agreed With Most Strongly On Pre-Test

Statement	Pre-Test Means	Post-Test Changes
1. Understanding the culture of a country is important for success in business	4.83	+0.13
2. Studying abroad is an integral part of learning about international business	4.21	-0.04
3. Talking to European business people and/or academics is an appropriate way to learn how to do business in Europe	4.17	-0.13
4. Talking to U.S. business people and/or academics with experience in Europe is an appropriate way to learn how to do business in Europe	4.04	-0.08
5. Entering a foreign market to do business is very difficult	3.92	-0.54
6. Speaking the official language of a country is important for success in business	3.75	+0.54
7. The United States may rank behind the European Community in economic power by the year 2010	3.58	0
8. I would feel comfortable being part of a team sent by my company to set up business in Europe	3.46	+0.54

TABLE 4

Europe

Statements 24 Participants Disagreed With Most Strongly On Pre-Test

Statement	Pre-Test Means	Post-Test Changes
1. Negotiating with business people in the United States is very similar to negotiating with business people in other countries	1.54	+0.50
2. Management practices are fundamentally the same around the world	1.58	+0.80
3. Knowing the culture of one European country is sufficient for developing business practices suitable throughout the European Community	1.61	+0.02
4. Trade barriers established by the European Community will make it almost impossible to enter the market after 1992	2.08	-0.54
5. Doing business with people from Europe makes me uncomfortable	2.29	0
6. I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with European companies	2.42	+0.87
7. The general argumentativeness of the Europeans is a style used to mask the importance of specific issues	2.46	+0.12
8. Informal behavior is appropriate for doing business in Europe	2.46	-0.33
9. I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with companies in Europe	2.46	+1.00
10. I would feel comfortable being the primary representative of my company to set up business in Europe	2.58	+0.46

TABLE 5

Statements For Which Participants Indicated The Largest Attitude Changes On The Post-Test

Statement	Pre-Test Means	Post-Test Changes
1. (Asia) I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with Japanese companies	2.16	+1.04 Disagree less
2. (Europe) I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with companies in Europe	2.46	+1.00 Disagree less
3. (Asia) I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with companies in Asia	2.11	+0.99 Disagree less
4. (Asia) Trade barriers make it almost impossible to do business with Japan	2.80	-0.95 Disagree more
5. (Europe) I feel comfortable developing my company's strategy for competing with European companies	2.42	+0.87 Disagree less
6. (Europe) Management practices are fundamentally the same around the world	1.58	+0.80 Disagree less
7. (Asia) Entering a foreign market to do business is very difficult	4.30	-0.75 Agree less
8. (Asia) I would feel comfortable being the primary representative of my company to set up business in Asia	2.55	+0.75 Disagree less
9. (Asia) I would feel comfortable being part of a team sent by my company to set up business in Asia	3.70	+0.65 Agree more

TABLE 5 (cont.)

10. (Europe) Entering a foreign market to do business is very difficult	3.92	-0.54	Agree less
11. (Europe) Speaking the official language of a country is important for success in business	3.75	+0.54	Agree more
12. (Europe) I would feel comfortable being part of a team sent by my company to set up business in Europe	3.46	+0.54	Agree more
13. (Europe) Trade barriers established by the European Community will make it almost impossible to enter the market after 1992	2.08	-0.54	Disagree more
14. (Europe) Negotiating with business people in the United States is very similar to negotiating with business people in other countries	1.54	+0.50	Disagree less
15. (Europe) I would feel comfortable being the primary representative of my company to set up business in Europe	2.58	+0.46	Disagree less
16. (Asia) Management practices are fundamentally the same around the world	1.60	+0.40	Disagree less
17. (Asia) Negotiating with business people in the United States is very similar to negotiating with business people in other countries	1.30	+0.35	Disagree less
18. (Europe) Informal behavior is appropriate for doing business in Europe	2.46	-0.33	Disagree more
19. (Asia) Reading books is an appropriate way to learn how to do business in Asia	3.35	-0.30	Agree less
20. (Asia) The Asian's indirect style of communication makes it easy for them to mislead other people	3.20	+0.30	Agree more